

## ACTS CHAPTER 23

### OBSERVATION

### INTERPRETATION

### APPLICATION

Monday 7:00pm, H 105 (1st floor, High School--foot of stairs, behind the gym, by the vending machine area), Tuesday 7:00am, Family, Room, CCCM – Phil Twente, cell #714 425 9221; email – [ptwente@gmail.com](mailto:ptwente@gmail.com) For past studies, audio plus notes, go to: <http://www.missioncalvary.com/> Click on “Bible Studies” on the left column. References include commentaries by numerous pastor/teachers.

### **THE SANHEDRIN DIVIDED – VS. 1-10**

Act 23:1 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

Act 23:2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

Act 23:3 Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

Act 23:4 And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

Act 23:5 Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

Act 23:6 But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"

Act 23:7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.

Act 23:8 For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.

Act 23:9 Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God."

### **vs. 1-2 PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN**

Paul is before the Sanhedrin. The chief priest and the council are there. The rudeness of the high priest is appalling. He was not about to let Paul speak until he was ready to hear him.

**vs. 3-5** See here the character of an honest man. He sets God before him, and lives as in his sight. He makes conscience of what he says and does, and, according to the best of his knowledge, he keeps from whatever is evil, and cleaves to what is good. He is conscientious in all his words and conduct. Those who thus live before God, may, like Paul, have confidence both toward God and man. Though the answer of Paul contained a just rebuke and prediction, he seems to have been too angry at the treatment he received in uttering them. Great men may be told of their faults, and public complaints may be made in a proper manner; but the law of God requires respect for those in authority.

**v. 6** I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: for the hope of the resurrection of the dead am I called in question - So he was in effect; although not formally, or explicitly.

**v. 7 A dissension** - A dispute, or difference. **And the assembly** - The council. Compare Act 14:4. The Pharisees embraced, as he desired and expected, his side of the question, and became his advocates, in opposition to the Sadducees, who were arrayed against him I believe

**v. 8** The Pharisees confess both - Both the resurrection, and the existence of angels and separate spirits

**v. 9** And the scribes of the Pharisees' side arising - Every sect contains both learned and unlearned. The former used to be the mouth of the party. If a spirit - St. Paul in his speech from the stairs had affirmed, that Jesus, whom they knew to have been dead, was alive, and that he had spoken to him from heaven, and again in a vision. So they add nothing, only they construe it in their own way, putting an angel or spirit for Jesus.

**v. 5** It was questionable that he was truly the high priest and so Paul could be using a play on the situation to let everybody know that the whole structure here is questionable. Paul is saying, "I'm not aware that you're the high priest under such circumstances." I believe that Paul is submissive to God, but he is questioning this group of people. Ex. 22:28

**v. 7** God gave Paul the wisdom on the occasion to cause a controversy that actually would deliver him from the Sanhedrin back into the hands of the Romans, which would ultimately get him to Rome. And that was God's plan – the sovereignty of God.

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Act 23:10 Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring *him* into the barracks.

### THE PLOT AGAINST PAUL – VS. 11-22

Act 23:11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

Act 23:12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Act 23:13 Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy.

Act 23:14 They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul.

Act 23:15 Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

Act 23:16 So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

Act 23:17 Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him."

Act 23:18 So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you."

### INTERPRETATION

v. 10 This appears to be the worst dissension recorded in the Book of Acts concerning any group. Paul's life is so in danger again that the Roman captain reaches in and saves him from the angry Sanhedrin. While I have defended Gallio's concept of the separation of church and state, the state is protecting the apostle Paul at this point, which is quite proper. So the chief captain rescues Paul again without learning the real nature of the hatred against Paul.

v. 11 *Be of good cheer, Paul* - It is no wonder if, with all these trials and difficulties, St. Paul was much dejected in mind; and especially as he had not any direct intimation from God what the end of the present trials would be: to comfort him and strengthen his faith, God gave him this vision. *So you must also bear witness at Rome* - This was pleasing intelligence to Paul, who had long desired to see that city, and preach the Gospel of Christ there. He appears to have had an intimation that he should see it; but how, he could not tell; and this vision satisfied him that he should be sent thither by God himself. This would settle every fear and scruple concerning the issue of the present persecution. The Lord stood by him and told him to be of good courage. The Lord was in absolute control. When we are faithful to God in a given situation, God will use that to give you another opportunity. The greatest words a faithful child of God can hear are "there is more for you to do". These words grieve a lazy servant, but bring joy to a faithful servant!

v. 12 Some of the Jews bound themselves - Such execrable vows were not uncommon among the Jews. And if they were prevented from accomplishing what they had vowed, it was an easy matter to obtain absolution from their rabbis.

v. 13-15 This is the plot to put Paul to death. It's well that the Lord Himself has made it very clear to Paul that He has a different plan for him; he is going to Rome.

v. 16-18 Paul is exerting his right as a Roman citizen, which he has a perfect right to do. Also, we learn more about Paul's family. We see that he has a sister who lives with her family in Jerusalem.

### APPLICATION

**v.11 Notice the comfort of the Lord! – “*the Lord stood by him*”!!**

**“Be of good cheer”** Mat 9:2 *And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.* Mat 14:27 *But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

Mar 6:50 *For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.*

Joh 16:33 *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Act 23:11 *And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*

Act 27:22 *And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.*

Act 27:25 *Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*

Paul, you testified of Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness of Me in Rome. So shutting back the past. Just shutting that out, **He points him towards the future. One of the best ways of getting out of the doldrums from thinking of failures of the past is to get new goals established. To start looking forward.** As Paul writing to the Philippians (Philippians 4:14), said, forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward to mark for the prize of the high calling of God, which is in Christ Jesus. So he sets the past aside, reaching for what God has in the future. And it's important that we do the same. So many people just get discouraged and get caught up in the past. And they never go beyond the fact that they tried once and it failed. So they just have sort of given up. Not recognizing and realizing **that God requires us to just testify and be faithful in our witness.** And if we are that, then that is all that God requires.

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**Act 23:19** Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?"

**Act 23:20** And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him.

**Act 23:21** But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you."  
**Act 23:22** So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him*, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me."

### SENT TO FELIX – VS. 23-35

**Act 23:23** And he called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night;

**Act 23:24** and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor."

**Act 23:25** He wrote a letter in the following manner:

**Act 23:26** Claudius Lysias, To the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings.

**Act 23:27** This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

### INTERPRETATION

v. 19 *And the commander took him by the hand* - In a mild, condescending way. Lysias seems to have conducted this whole affair with great integrity, humanity, and prudence.

v. 20 *And he said ...* - In what way this young man had received intelligence of this, we can only conjecture. It is not improbable that he was a student under some one of the Jewish teachers, and that he might have learned it of him. It is not at all probable that the purpose of the 40 men would be very closely kept. Indeed, it is evident that they were not themselves very anxious about concealing their oath, as they mentioned it freely to the chief priests and elders, Act 23:14.

v. 21 *waiting for the promise from you* - Waiting for your consent to bring him down to them.

v. 22 *So the commander let the young man depart,....* After he had had the account from him, and was master of the whole affair: *and commanded him, Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me*; which was prudently said; it was a right and wise thing to conceal this matter, that the men might go on with their designs, and an opportunity be taken to convey Paul away, before the time came fixed by them to execute them; for otherwise, should it have been known that their plot was discovered, they would have entered upon new measures.

v. 23 **PAUL SENT TO CAESAREA** The chief captain goes into action. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. A centurion, you remember, had one hundred soldiers under him.

v. 24 *Provide mounts* - If a change should be necessary, to set Paul on - So we read of his riding once; but not by choice.

v. 25 Although Luke may have had the actual letter, when he says the letter was "after this manner" it probably means that he didn't have access to the letter but is giving us the sense of it.

v. 26 Notice the formal manner of address. In those days they didn't sign letters as we do today. They put their name at the beginning of the letter rather than at the end of the letter.

v. 27 The captain in Jerusalem wants the governor in Caesarea to know that he is performing his duty. He is protecting Roman citizens.

### APPLICATION

v. 11 - Jesus meeting Paul...continued...

It was also a message of *commendation*. The Lord did not rebuke Paul for going to Jerusalem. Rather, He commended him for the witness he had given, even though that witness had not been received. When you read the account of Paul's days in Jerusalem, you get the impression that everything Paul did failed miserably. His attempt to win over the legalistic Jews only helped cause a riot in the temple, and his witness before the Sanhedrin left the council in confusion. But the Lord was pleased with Paul's testimony, and that's what really counts. Finally, it was a message of *confidence*: Paul would go to Rome! This had been Paul's desire for months (Act 19:21; Rom 15:22-29), but events in Jerusalem had made it look as though that desire would not be fulfilled. What encouragement this promise gave to Paul in the weeks that followed, difficult weeks when leaders lied about him, when fanatics tried to kill him, and when government officials ignored him. In all of this, the Lord was with him and fulfilling His perfect plan to get His faithful servant to Rome.

It would be **hard to exaggerate the calm courage which this assurance must have brought to Paul during his three further trials, his two years' imprisonment and his hazardous voyage to Rome. Between these two powers, religious and civil, hostile and friendly, Jerusalem and Rome, Paul found himself trapped, unarmed and totally vulnerable. Luke seems to offer Paul to us as a model of Christian valor. The source of his courage was his serene confidence in the truth. He was well aware that the Romans had no case against him. He was convinced that the Jews had no case either, because his faith was the faith of the fathers, and the gospel was the fulfillment of the law. And above all he knew that his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was with him and would keep his promise that he would bear witness, someday, somehow, in Rome!**

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Act 23:28 And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council.

Act 23:29 I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains.

Act 23:30 And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell.

Act 23:31 Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought *him* by night to Antipatris.

Act 23:32 The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks.

Act 23:33 When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

Act 23:34 And when the governor had read *it*, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that *he was* from Cilicia,

Act 23:35 he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

### INTERPRETATION

**vs. 28- 29** It is clear that Claudius Lysias never did know exactly what the charge was against Paul. He knew it pertained to their law. Under Roman law Paul was not guilty of anything worthy of death or of imprisonment. The hand of God was in control of everything. Paul's nephew, the son of his sister, tells Paul about the plot to kill him. Paul called a centurion and ask that he take his nephew to the chief captain to tell him of the plot. The captain then sent Paul to Governor Felix. The centurions usually listened to nobody but in this case God was in control. The chief captain could have handled it himself but rather sent him to Felix. All of this is part of God's plan to put Paul where He wanted him to be.

**vs. 30-35** We will find that his accusers were quick to come down to Caesarea. They didn't hesitate to follow Paul. As we move along, I think you will detect that Paul is not defending himself as much as he is witnessing for Christ. The Lord Jesus had said he would witness before governors and rulers and kings. He is being brought before them. This is God's method. Paul is in the will of God, and God is carrying out His purpose. The chief captain sent a letter to Felix in Caesarea and to present Paul before him. Felix was a slave and declared a freeman under the mother of Claudius Caesar. Claudius liked Felix a lot. He learned all of the immoral practices of the Roman family. He had three different queens. He hated the Jews. He would hear Paul but not until his accusers, the Jews, are also there. Paul was in prison two years before he comes before Felix.

#### Holy, Holy, Holy- London Orchestra Festival

*1. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!*

*2. Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,  
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,  
which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.*

*4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea.  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.  
AMEN!*

### APPLICATION

#### Questions:

1. V.1 Why do you think the high priest reacted so strongly to the following statement by Paul, that he ordered him to be struck on the mouth? "*Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day*"
2. Why do you think Paul responded with such zeal and emotion – "*God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!*" (v.3)
3. Do you think Paul was justified in deliberately setting the Pharisees and the Sadducees against one another? (v.6)
4. In verse 10 we see the third great dissension/ commotion in trying to kill Paul. Do you think that at that time Paul must have felt his attempt to convert his former buddies was total failure. Do you think he failed?
5. In chapter 21:20, we were told "*You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believe*". We have no record that any of the believers ever came forward to stand with Paul during any of the three commotions. Why?
6. When you present the gospel to someone or a group of people and nobody responds, that the presentation was a failure.
7. Are we commanded to save anyone? To present the gospel? To make disciples and to be a witness?
8. On what basis do you think you will be held accountable on that day when you stand before the Lord?
9. What did the Lord think of Paul's efforts here in Jerusalem? (v. 11)
10. Did any of the twelve hear these same words of encouragement from the Lord, "*Be of good cheer*"? If so on what occasion/s?
11. How many time did the Romans save Paul from probable death in chapters 21-23?
12. Please comment on whether you think Paul's return to Jerusalem to witness to the Sanhedrin members was the perfect will of God? Was it blessed by the Lord? Would you have been willing to cause three/four dissensions which nearly cost him his life each time?